**Easter 6 John 14: 23-29**; (Acts 16: 9-15; Revelation 21: 10, 22 – 22:5)

Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

 ‘I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.” If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

I was doing an exercise with both groups of confirmation candidates this past week in which they were asked to rank in order of importance to them a set of words and phrases about things we do in church - ten of them. There was: making friends, receiving communion, reading the Bible, praying, helping each other, learning, worshipping and singing, relaxing, eating and encountering God.

Eating? Well if you are a small child maybe. Relaxing?? Certainly, the young people in the confirmation group were keen on that, but whether it happens when they go to church or not, I couldn’t draw out of them. The others bear some serious thought. What is important to us and why? And actually, we might shed a little bit of light on the relaxing thing in a few minutes too.

For now though: in the gospel reading today, Jesus says: the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.  Which definitely presupposes that we have already heard and paid attention to that which Jesus has said to us.

There is a Church of England body called the Ministry Council, which met for two days this week and which concerns itself with the process by which theological formation – or education – takes place. They don’t like to have it called ‘training’, and in fairness it is a process of formation rather than a simple sausage machine churning out priests all the same in shape and size and doctrine too. But while they were discussing this theological formation, they also noted that formation is a gift for the whole people of God. You have heard me say before that we are all theologians: we all develop our own thinking about matters of faith, using a variety of sources, depending on what we have each been exposed to over time.

And so if this formation is a gift for the whole people of God, then we are all, clearly, in that process – learning, growing in wisdom and in the depth of our faith. Our baptism calls all of us to that role – therefore, theological education is for the whole people of God. But what would it look like if we all engaged in that process?

Back in the 2nd century, the time when the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the chronicle of the early church, was written, there was no ordination training, no separate educational provision for those who took a priestly role in those churches, but there **was** a very substantial catechetical process – which just means that everyone who was part of the church, in the course of their regular church attendance - engaged in reflection on faith, in telling stories and teaching each other, because they were elements of normal worship. By that means, people built one another up and grew together, both in faith and in their sense of community. So then, what would it take to recover that process?

So, says Jesus, we are all taught by the Spirit, through our baptism. And he says: the Spirit will remind you – so what is it that we need to be reminded of? I think: that we are all called to study the scripture, think about Jesus, ask questions about who God is for us, how is our life is shaped by faith, how is our understanding of faith developing…. So that deals with both the teaching and the reminding, but our part is to do a bit of the work. We can’t sit back and just assume that the Spirit will do it all - if there is nothing there to be reminded of, it is going to be Very Hard Work indeed for the Spirit to do.

So what can we do that will give the Spirit a bit of a hand? Thinking about growing together in faith – and the fact that I was talking about how to help that along, with a group of my peers on the leadership programme earlier this week – a number of us here at St Peter’s have been wrestling with the notion that we need to do more for people, in this church and maybe also beyond, who are interested in doing exactly that: growing in faith; but who maybe want to ask questions and find out what is in the Bible and stuff like that, in surroundings which relaxed and informal. I’m thinking about doing something in the Belli Centre perhaps – daytime? evening? I really don’t know, but if any of you has any thoughts on the subject – either to offer some ideas about what you want or to register an interest in coming to such a thing, do please let me know. It would help me no end! And there – now I have gone public, I am stuck with making it happen, so please let me know how I can best do that.

Just to start getting our theological brains working, as it were: if there was just one word you could use to describe Jesus, what would it be? A friend of mine, when asked, waffled on – as I suspect I would have done – about us being loved children of God, and therefore his word for Jesus was ‘Lover’.

But there was – he died in 2013 - an American philosopher called Dallas Willard, who did a lot of work in the field of Christian spiritual formation. His work emphasized the importance of deliberately choosing to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Being an apprentice of Jesus, he said, involves learning about activities that might help one grow in the fruit of the spirit, as detailed in Galatians: namely love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and peace.

And when asked that question about which single word he would use to describe Jesus, Willard said ‘relaxed’. I thought that was a very strange word to use, but then I remembered the story of the storm on the lake, when Jesus had gone to sleep and the disciples were in mortal fear of their lives and were sure they were all going to drown, so they woke Jesus up. And he calmly did the necessary: stilled the wind and stopped the waves, and then asked them why they had doubted. And we can see exactly why they were frightened – and we would have been too – but Willard’s point, I think, was that Jesus wouldn’t have been afraid of drowning in the first place. So he was entirely relaxed. There is something about being held in a relationship of love with God that, come what may, means there is no need to fear.

Finally, the result of sending the Holy Spirit is, according to the next line of the text: Peace I leave with you. Jesus is indeed the Peaceful One. And he goes on: my peace I give you. Not just any old peace, but Jesus’ peace: that completely relaxed peace that comes of a deep awareness of God, that might be at the back of our minds when we are in the middle of a busy working day, but never actually leaves us.

Peace is a gift of the Spirit, one of those nine gifts mentioned in Galatians. It is that unfathomable stillness, that solidity, even though everything else might be spiralling completely out of control.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. And do not be afraid. That is a great gift in any age – but perhaps particularly in the current political climate. Let us all resolve this week to give the Spirit a helping hand to see us all through.

**Amen**